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Letter dated 16 November 2004 from the Permanent Representative of Ivory Coast to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to inform you about recent events in Côte d'Ivoire and to request you to submit the requests which they have prompted from the Government of Côte d'Ivoire to the Security Council for decision.

On Saturday 6 November 2004 an accident, with regard to which the circumstances have yet to be clarified and the responsibility determined, killed eight French soldiers from the Licorne force and one American civilian, well as injuring about 30 French soldiers from the same force.

The President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire and the Government and people of Côte d'Ivoire request you once again to convey condolences on their behalf to the French Government and the bereaved families, their best wishes for speedy recovery to the injured, and the assurances of their sympathy to the families of all the victims of the accident.

The memory of the deceased, the honour of the French survivors of this disaster and the honour of the defence and security forces of Côte d'Ivoire demand that the circumstances of the accident should be established objectively and responsibility for the accident determined on the same basis. The justice of any punishment for any acts of negligence which caused this painful event can be guaranteed only at that price.

Accordingly, the President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire and the Government and people of Côte d'Ivoire will be grateful to you for any measures which you may see fit to take for the prompt conduct of an independent international inquiry into the accident.

Despite the uncertainties of the situation and convinced of the responsibility of the defence and security forces of Côte d'Ivoire for the accident, members of the Licorne force, on the express instructions of the President of the French Republic, destroyed with weapons of war, on the ground at Yamoussoukro Airport five minutes after the accident, the two Ivorian military aircraft believed to have caused the accident.

They fired at the same time at another Ivorian aircraft which was landing at the same airport. This fire wounded the pilot and some civilians on board this aircraft. The aircraft sustained serious damage.

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In Abidjan, members of the Licorne force hacked to pieces four parked military aircraft of Côte d'Ivoire which had not engaged in any activity in the air on that day. They destroyed with rocket fire an inactive anti-aircraft battery and in so doing killed two Ivorian soldiers.

They even attacked two Grumman civilian command aircraft of the President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, they too symbols of the sovereignty of my country, which had been loaned a few days earlier to some French politicians, members of the party in power, for an aborted attempt to extricate the two French journalists held hostage in Iraq.

These first acts of violence committed by France in Côte d'Ivoire have prompted the following observations from my Government:

1. These acts were designated as reprisals by the highest French authorities but were inspired, at the time, solely by the firm conviction of those authorities that the conditions for the exercise of their right of self-defence had already been met. That conviction was not yet justified either by irrefutable proof that the accident in question had been caused deliberately or by an impartial determination of responsibility for it. It bore the stamp of a priori prejudice. It was biased.

2. The acts were committed entirely independently by the Licorne force and were deliberately excessive, and they cannot be classified as support for the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) or as intervention dictated by security conditions, both of which activities are prohibited for the Licorne force by Security Council resolution 1528 (2004). Such acts would be clearer and easier to understand if undertaken strictly within the mandate of UNOCI. That would entail placing the Licorne force under the operational command of UNOCI.

3. The non-French provenance of the equipment irreversibly destroyed suggests that the extreme savagery of these acts may have stemmed from an increasingly evident French prejudice. This prejudice would be significantly reduced, and even disappear, if the measure suggested above was put promptly into effect.

4. These acts constitute unfriendly attacks on the honour and sovereignty of a State enjoying the benefit of France's contribution to the restoration of its territorial integrity and they ought to prompt apologies from France and compensation for the damage which it caused.

When the news of these acts of destruction spread, some young men and women, civilians and unarmed, stormed into the streets to see what had happened in Abidjan and demonstrate their shock.

At Abidjan Airport and in Cocody, in particular on the esplanade of the Hôtel Ivoire requisitioned by France and adjacent to the residence of the head of State, supposedly warning shots fired by members of the Licorne force killed dozens of people and wounded hundreds more. The motive of protecting French nationals and foreigners, who in fact were not under threat in those places, was transformed into grounds for slaughtering peaceful demonstrators.

These deliberate killings, which had very little to do with the maintenance of order, are not part of the mandate established by the United Nations either. They must be the subject of an international inquiry, and I should be grateful if you would order and conduct it.

They also fuel the widespread conviction of the people of Côte d'Ivoire of France's biased approach to the resolution of the country's crisis and the feeling that the Licorne force cares little for the lives of young Ivorians.

The return of the Licorne force to its quarters and its integration in UNOCI would restore calm in Abidjan and reassure the people of the formal impartiality of the forces deployed in Côte d'Ivoire under the United Nations mandate.

I should also like to take this opportunity to draw your attention once again to the need to initiate, with determination and without delay, the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants in order to allow the continuation, in a calm political and social environment, of the adoption of the legislative and regulatory texts called for in the Linas-Marcoussis and Accra III Agreements.

It must be stressed in that connection that four of the texts awaiting adoption have not yet been submitted to the Government for its consideration by the Ministers of Communications, Justice and the Interior, two of them members of new political forces. I am referring to the texts on the media, nationality, identification, and the membership of the independent electoral commission.

Lastly, your formal support for the proposal to submit the suggested amendment to article 35 of the Constitution to a referendum would maintain the constitutionality of the amendment by taking advantage of the opportunity offered by the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, which should be started as soon as possible once all the conditions have been met.

I shall be grateful for any steps which you may see fit to take to have this letter issued as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Philippe **Djangoné-Bi**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative